SCHELLING'S LETTER ENDORSING CKM (REF)
(SHLDOR)

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

THOMAS C. SCHELLING
Lucius N. Littauer Professor of Political Economy

79 JOHN F. KENNEDY STREET
(617) 495-1185

REF

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Mr. Theodor H. Nelson
8480 Fredericksburg #138
San Antonio, Texas 78229

Dear Mr. Nelson:

I remember your name, though I have no picture of you in my mind. Thank you for sending me your Checkmate proposal.

I have a colleague, Dr. Mark Kleiman, who has been doing a lot of work on the epidemiology of AIDS in this country and what kinds of testing techniques and programs may prove optimal for different groups in the population. I shall pass your proposal along to him. He is a good strategist.

I take your proposal very seriously. If it had to be done officially, nationwide or statewide, I would admire the ingenuity behind it but have no hope for it or anything like it. What is most attractive is, as you point out, that it makes perfectly good sense on a small scale; once Polaroid or Hewlett Packard or somebody has developed the technology, it can get started spontaneously in different places and spread until it has become quite comprehensive.

I think the key to success is in your story of the King of Denmark. From what I can tell about transmission of the disease in this country, in contrast, say, to mechanisms of transmission in central Africa, a very large and respectable part of the population for a long time is likely to be sufficiently confident of the absence of any infectious contact that they will have no personal interest in getting tested. (Or, like so many of us, they will have the good intentions but never get around to it.) These are people who have sufficiently celibate or monogamous lives that they may feel they have no need to exchange pendants with prospective partners. They are the ones who must be induced to believe in and comply with the system. The campaign of

publicity must make clear that responsible citizens will display pendants in public to support the system. Instead of "Save the Whales" it's "Stop the Spread of AIDS." I must not only wear my pendant in class, in the faculty dining room, and when I go to a friend's house for dinner or to a faculty meeting, I must learn to make friends, colleagues, and students uneasy if I perceive them not to be wearing their pendants. You may want to consider with some care just which populations should be targeted in an initial campaign--who are the people who are likely to participate conscientiously when they learn about the project, and how much influence do they have on others in their own groups or on people outside their particular demographic groups? I think these do not have to be people who are interested themselves in being tested, just people who will don, so to speak, the yellow star of David.

You may want to see if you can emphasize a little more the advantage of the system to the person who fails the test. You state that most of the people who would fail are people who know themselves to be at risk and prefer for various reasons not to have their being carriers verified. In years to come, if the disease spreads more in the heterosexual population there may be many more potential carriers who would want to know, for example women wanting to become pregnant, or discharged servicemen who consider themselves to have been exposed and do not want to spread the disease, if they have it, when they go home. But aside from permitting such people to be tested and, if found sero-positive, to keep that information private, the pendant permits a carrier to advertise that he cares or she cares and is prepared to exchange pendants as a prelude to physical intimacy. The person at a social gathering who wears no pendant displays himself or herself as not conscientiously concerned, not cautious, not prepared to exchange status. The pendant worn by a carrier legitimizes his or her being asked, by another person wearing a pendant, to share the information. As you point out, it permits two carriers to make identifying contact in a socially acceptable way and it permits a carrier to display to a non-carrier that he or she was conscientiously prepared to reveal his or her status to protect the second party.

I have one thought about the importance of encouraging the wearing of pendants by people who have no intention of getting tested. It permits people to be tested privately and not to have it known that they were tested, while still participating in the system. I can imagine monogamous middle-aged husbands and wives who would conscientiously participate

in wearing pendants but who might become suspicious of each other if they got tested. My getting tested could mean to my wife that I must have been unfaithful; my urging her to be tested could mean that I thought she may have been unfaithful; my getting tested might communicate to my wife that I suspected her of suspecting me and my fidelity was being put to a test along with my blood. With your system I can wear a pendant and get tested without telling my wife anything but that as a responsible person I was participating in the worldwide scheme.

Another thought is that if I pass the test and got a pendant that opened with all the appropriate certification I would probably not wear it around my neck. I would keep it in a very safe place until it was time to exchange pendants with somebody, and even if I had it on my person I might want it hidden where there was no chance it could be lost or stolen. If I were afraid that somebody would bully me into handing over my pendant or would forcefully examine it, I would still have the option of producing the passing pendant if that were what I wished to do. The best protection for carriers would be a system in which people who passed the test participated in a rule of secrecy according to which they did not make it easy for people to tell who had passed and who hadn't.

There is a problem you do not discuss but that I think you have to discuss. That is the possibility that people will be coerced to display their status whenever they are in a position where some privilege or opportunity could be withheld from those who do not or cannot produce evidence of their innocence. Employers, dentists, even voters might want potential employees, patients, and candidates for office to display freedom from the disease. They could insist now, but it might be much easier to get away with if there were a universal system to which every "clean" person could turn for easy certification. Your analogy with asking to see my bank statement is perhaps apt: my employer, even my dentist, and possibly the voting public might have a claim to some kind of financial revelation, and they might exercise it with respect to my AIDS status. You may want to consider some kind of legal safeguards, such as making it a criminal offense to ask to see the pendant or even to imply, by announcement, that excuses will be found to decline people who do not volunteer their pendants without being asked.

Keep me informed of your progress. And thank you for sharing the idea with me.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas C. Schelling

TCS/cst

Presentation outline

- Fundamental concepts of the Xanadu Hypertext System™
- The current implementation
- Hands-on demonstration
- Using the Xanadu Hypertext System™ in information management
- Questions and answers